



▲ Joan and John Herberger



▲ Miriam and Don Burkhart

An Inside Scoop to a Successful Marriage

BY JESSICA LARSON, MPM

The *St. Augustine Catholic* had the pleasure of interviewing several couples celebrating more than 50 years of marriage at the November 4 Anniversary Celebration hosted by the diocesan Family Life Office and held at Holy Family Catholic Church in Jacksonville. Each couple provided insight into their decades-long lives together and their keys to success for future generations of young love.

John and Joan Herberger

John and Joan Herberger, both in their 90s, just celebrated their 76th anniversary. Joan shared, “When we hit our 50th anniversary, I thought, how did we get here already? And now, 76 years, time has passed so fast.”

Joan caught her first glance of John when he was a pitcher playing on the Pendleton Baseball team when she was 18. She and her friends would meet up with the players after the game for refreshments, and one year later, they married. Their love blossomed, and three children were born – two boys and one daughter.

The couple endured profound loss early in life. Joan’s mother passed away soon after she was born, and their daughter went home to the Lord prematurely. Despite these heartbreaking losses, the couple found many joys together. They shared the stories of their childhood and the Catholic education

they received, leaving New York because they were tired of shoveling snow, and with joy, their two sons and the successes they have achieved.

The couple resides in a Jacksonville assisted living home. Joan expressed gratitude for the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to the homebound who bring the Eucharist to the community on Saturdays and the monthly Tuesday Masses.

“We are too stiff to get out,” said Joan. Extending the Holy Faith Parish community into the assisted living facility brings the church to their home.

They were overjoyed to participate in the anniversary celebration Mass. Joan joyfully described, “They called our names, and everyone clapped for us; we were the longest-married couple in attendance.”

Joan highlighted the keys to the Herberger successful marriage. She said, “You can’t be stubborn; you have to say ‘yes’ quite often. And, most importantly, be thoughtful and kind.”



FRAN RUCHALSKI

▲ Leo and Magdalene Weber

Don and Miriam Burkhardt

One evening at a Navy base in Jacksonville, Don walked onto the dance floor to a sea of young women. As each began to pair off, there stood Miriam. Don remembers, “There she was, standing right before me, my future wife.” The young couple shared dances, a coke at Tad’s restaurant, and some common roots from Covington, Ky., when he met her family.

The couple grew up and raised their family in Jacksonville. Miriam shared, “Our marriage just flowed.” The couple described how they attended church and participated in their children’s education at Assumption. “We built relationships with our children’s friends. They came to the house to play pool or watch football games, which they still do today. We are a part of their lives, which gives us much happiness,” smiled Miriam.

The couple share three daughters, a son, six grandchildren and 11 great-

grandchildren. Miriam said their family gatherings have outgrown their house. “For Don’s 90th birthday, we had the party on the front driveway! When we look at family pictures, I think we are blessed to have all this.”

The couple shared their secrets to a successful 68-year-long marriage. Don reflected, “Put more into your marriage than you get out of it.” Miriam followed up by saying, “Make the best of each day and keep working at your marriage. Don’t give up. You will have ups and downs – no marriage is perfect. Just keep working on it and remember your vows.”

Leo and Magdalene Weber

Madge met Leo at a Coney Island Moonlight Gardens dance in Cincinnati, Ohio. Leo sent a friend over to assess Madge’s interest in dancing with him, and, as they say, the rest is history! She was attracted to his generosity and hard work ethic. She glowed, “My sister

has developmental disabilities. I treasured how Leo loved and respected her.”

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The triune God is a communion of love, and the family is its living reflection.”

(Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 11)

After a year of dating and a yearlong engagement, the couple married and recently celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary. Leo and Madge have six children, four living and two that passed away early in life.

Through the early years, Leo’s work frequently moved the family to job opportunities. “We lived in 33 different homes,”

chuckled Madge. Mass and keeping close to Jesus kept the family rooted through all the changes. No matter where we were, we attended Mass and participated in the celebrations.

Madge shared the joys of her four children, their 13 grandchildren, and soon-to-be 17 great-grandchildren. “When we were first married, it was just the two of us. Then, the four children and their children and their children. I never thought there would be so many to follow behind us. God has been good.”

Madge revealed three keys to a successful marriage. “Be understanding to the other’s feelings and keep God always in your family. Finally, “We promised on our wedding day to always say ‘I love you’ before bed. We have said it each night for 65 years.” 🐦



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For more secrets to success, discover Pope Francis’ *Amoris Laetitia*, an apostolic exhortation addressing the pastoral care of families.